



Canada Thistle

Scientific Name:	<i>Cirsium arvense</i>
Weed Class:	C
Requirement:	Control*
Native To:	Asia and Europe
Toxicity:	Not known to be

*In Clark County, control of Canada thistle is required when growing on properties adjacent to crops. For details, contact the Weed Board at 564-397-6140 or weed.board@clark.wa.gov

Why is it a noxious weed?

Once established, Canada thistle spreads quickly, replacing native plants or desirable grasses. It grows in circular patches, spreading vegetatively through roots which can spread 10 -12' in one season. It poses an economic threat to the agriculture industry by reducing crop yields.

How would I identify it?

General Description

Canada Thistle is a rhizomatous, perennial, herbaceous plant. It grows 2 to 5 feet tall with slender grooved stems that branch only at the top. Dense clonal growth of male and female plants.

Flower Description

Flowerheads many, in clusters at tips of branched stems. Flowerheads are 1/2 to 3/4 inch in diameter and bloom June to October. Bracts under flowerheads many, with some having a weakly spined tip. Flower petals purple to pink (sometimes white).

Leaf Description

Leaves are alternately arranged and are lance shaped to narrowly oval. Margins range from smooth to spiny to somewhat toothed or lobed. Surfaces have variable hairs from densely to thinly hairy to no hairs present, with hairs typically on leaf undersides.

Stem Description

Stem shoots begin as a rosette and then grow upright stems after 2 to 4 weeks. Stems can be slightly hairy or without hairs. Stems are not winged as they are in the *Carduus* Genus.



Fruit/Seed Description

Seeds are around 0.16 inches (4 mm long) with tufts of bristles that help them disperse. Plants produce 1,500 seeds on average and may produce up to 5,300 seeds.

Where does it grow?

Canada Thistle is common in pastures and croplands. It also invades natural areas after a minimum of disturbance.

How does it reproduce?

It reproduces by tufted seeds dispersed by the wind. They can remain viable in the soil for over 20 years. Each plant has a fibrous taproot with deep, wide spreading horizontal roots. Small pieces of root can also grow into new plants.

Description used with permission from the Washington State Noxious Weed Control Board, www.nwcb.wa.gov

How do I control Canada Thistle?

The most effective way to manage weed infestations is to research, plan for, and use a combination of prevention and control methods specific to the problem weed. This approach is called **Integrated Weed Management (IWM)**, which uses mechanical, cultural, biological, and chemical control methods that effectively treat the problem weed yet protect human health, habitat, water, and other natural resources.

IWM Control Method		Effectiveness of Control Method			Timing and Notes **
		Good	Fair	Poor	
Digging				P	Root fragments that remain in the soil will re-sprout
Hand-Pulling				P	Root fragments that remain in the soil will re-sprout
Mowing			F		Will require repeated mowing - several times each growing season - to prevent seed production.
Tilling					Not recommended for most settings. However, in crop production, herbicides combined with tilling is very effective.
Bark Mulch				P	Not effective as sole control method
Black Plastic		G			Cover entire thistle patch, extending beyond. Leave in place for several years.
Cover Crop or Native Plant Restoration				P	Not effective as sole control method. Prep the site by first applying herbicide.
Soil Amendments				P	Not effective.
Managed Grazing				P	
Weed-Feeding Insects			F		Gall fly, stem mining weevil, seed head weevil and flea beetle are a few that will feed on Canada thistle. But none are effective as a sole control method.
Herbicides - (Examples*)		<i>Timing is Important! For most effective control, apply herbicides before plants bloom.</i>			
Aminopyralid	Milestone	G			In spring: Most effective during bud stage. In fall: Thistle will emerge after early fall rains. Spray on a sunny day mid-fall.
Glyphosate	Roundup	G			In spring: Most effective during bud stage. In fall: Thistle will emerge after early fall rains. Spray on a sunny day mid-fall.
Triclopyr	Garlon 3A		F		<i>Triclopyr will destroy Canada thistle top growth but does not have a lasting effect as it isn't particularly effective at killing the robust root system.</i> In spring: Most effective during bud stage. In fall: Thistle will emerge after early fall rains. Spray on a sunny day mid-fall.

*Brand names are listed as examples only. Other products may contain the listed chemical. Clark County does not endorse any product or brand name. Always read and follow the herbicide label.

****Timing of control is critical!** Herbicide treatments are often not effective or appropriate when plants are in flower. If the weeds have produced seed, bag the plants and place in garbage, not compost. Regardless of control method chosen, multiple treatments may be needed each year. For more information on IWM, specific herbicides, and timing of control, please contact the Weed Board at:



Clark County Noxious Weed Control Board • Vegetation Management

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